

My Experience as the Navy's First Plans and Tactics Officer
By LT Precious McQuade

Due to the fluctuating manning process for Department Heads, my Orders were initially to a Destroyer Squadron while I awaited the correct timing to relieve an Operations Officer within that squadron's ships. I had just commenced my PCS when I received a call from the First Department Head Detailer. By the end of the phone call, I found out I was joining an elite group of Officers selected for the Plans and Tactics Officer pilot program and would be attending Joint Targeting School starting the following week. What set me apart from my counterparts is I would deploy two weeks after the course completed, being the first in the Navy to establish the billet onboard USS ANZIO (CG 68), the Air and Missile Defense Commander for the HARRY S TRUMAN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP. Even with the short notice ORDMOD, I was excited to have the opportunity to get out to the Fleet after nearly 10 months of training and fill a billet doing something completely different than I expected. As a Nuclear SWO, the Plans and Tactics Officer billet gave me the opportunity to serve on a CG, since the only CRUDES job previously available for a SWO(N) was Operations Officer on a DDG.

One of the greatest things the Navy did when establishing this billet is empowering Unit Level Commanders and their PTO to determine the way ahead for developing this billet and its requisite department based on each individual ship's needs. My fellow PTOs and I, working with the guidance provided from PERS, brainstormed redistributing DH duties and came up with a basic plan to implement on each of our ships. Of course, each Command implemented our ideas slightly different to account for their various needs. Onboard ANZIO, Plans and Tactics Department is made up of the Training Officer, CA and OT Divisions (to include SSES), and the Independent Duty Intelligence Specialist. For the "Plans" portion of the job, I handle current operations and work closely with the Operations Officer to meet operational tasking and scheduling. All of these changes combined have created more bandwidth for all DHs, and since nothing is set in stone, we can continue to flex and provide feedback on how the billet should be implemented for potential Fleet-wide standardization.

If any of you are wondering "Where's the catch?", there isn't one! I am a DH like any other DH. I stand watch, have collateral duties, and own equipment, personnel and programs just like any other DH. That being said, there are some nuances we have worked around since Navy wide programs and systems, such as 3M, OMMS-NG, RSUPPLY and RADM, do not account for an additional department. All in all, we have been creative onboard ANZIO to make it work for us and to give our Sailors credit for the additional collateral duties they are holding, but I expect further change as this impacts more than one ship now that PTOs are implemented fleet wide and the pilot program is expanding.

What do my fellow DHs think? I arrived days before deployment, and therefore there were quite a few adjustments we all had to make to bring the billet online. Overall, having a PTO has positively impacted ANZIO. Not only has it reduced individual workload by adjusting the divisional responsibilities amongst OPS and WEPS, additionally it added another TAO giving all DHs more time to focus on other duties. It also brought dedicated DH level focus to the PBED process and allowed for greater flexibility for LNO duties, an important aspect in executing Strike Group duties as Air and Missile Defense Commander.

What does the future of PTO look like on ANZIO? We still have our growing pains, and squadron/strike group level integration is building, but I fully expect us to flex as our environment changes. I believe "non-deployed" PTO will have the opportunity to better develop tactical and shipboard integrated training, an opportunity we have not been afforded due to real world operations as ANZIO is over halfway complete with

her deployment. The experiences I am having by not only being the first PTO in the Navy, but the first to deploy, is providing a great opportunity to provide feedback to my counterparts who are ramping up for their Summer 2016 deployments.